

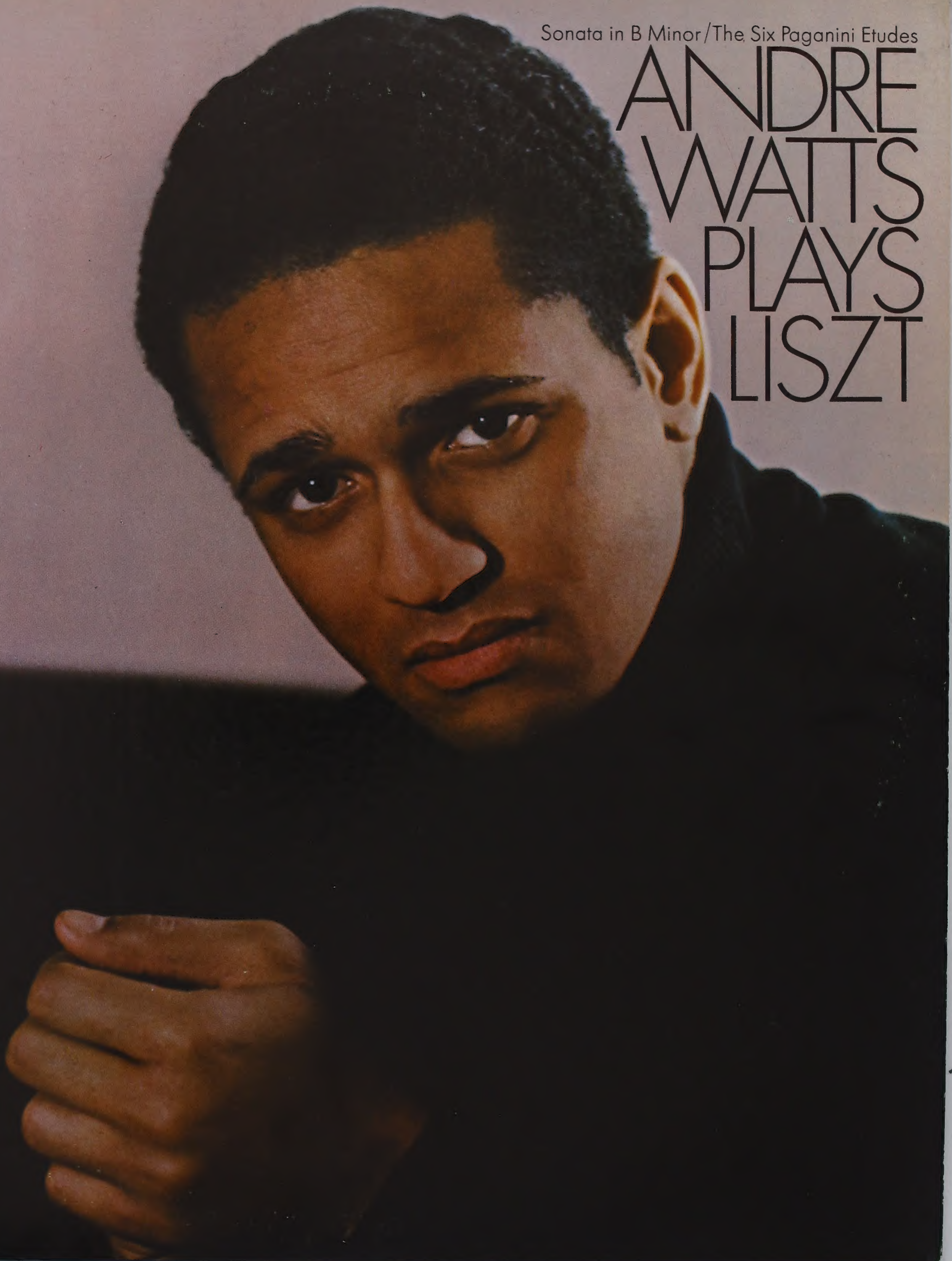
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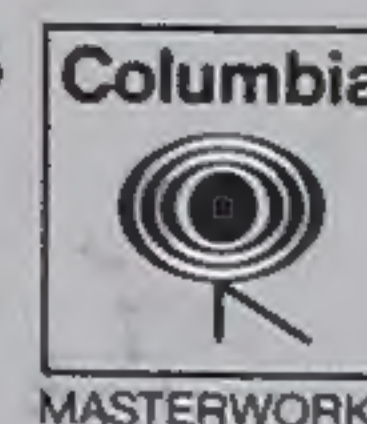
Sonata in B Minor/The Six Paganini Etudes

ANDRE  
WATTS  
PLAYS  
LISZT



Produced by Richard Killough

M 30488



# ANDRÉ WATTS PLAYS LISZT

## Side 1

Sonata in B Minor

## Side 2

The Six Paganini Etudes

I—G Minor

II—E-Flat Major

III—G-Sharp Minor (La Campanella)

IV—E Major

V—E Major (La Chasse)

VI—A Minor

The selections are in the public domain.

Today, we are apt to smile when we read of the sensation caused by Nicolò Paganini's arrival upon the music scene in 1828. Raven-haired and cadaverous, he emerged, in his late forties, from his native Italy and, within three or four years, conquered all of Europe with his demonic fiddling. (Rumor had it that, while languishing in jail, he had learned a secret violin method from the Devil himself.) Tickets to his sold-out concerts went for unprecedented sums. In Vienna, the enthusiasm for Paganini was so great that the arrival of a giraffe from Egypt, then an event of great moment, very nearly passed unnoticed. Clearly a case of mass hysteria. But then, what of the man's profound impact on such diverse musical geniuses as Schubert, Berlioz, Chopin, Schumann and Liszt? To the latter, it is safe to say, Paganini proved both a revelation and a catalyst.

Franz Liszt was the product of a school of piano-playing best exemplified by his boyhood teacher in Vienna, Carl Czerny: It taught pearly scales, fleet arpeggios and neat staccatos, which were applied with equal proficiency to the works of Beethoven and to the salon pieces then in favor. In 1823, the 12-year-old prodigy moved to Paris, where, in time, he grew into a brilliant, but despondent, young pianist—one painfully aware that, somehow, his great gifts were not being fulfilled. Then, he heard Paganini play: "Ah! Provided I don't first go mad," he wrote to a friend in 1832, "you will yet find an artist in me. 'I, too, am a painter!' cried Michelangelo upon beholding a masterpiece for the first time. Though poor and insignificant, your friend can't help repeating that great man's words ever since Paganini's last performance. What a man, what a violinist, what an artist! God, what sufferings, what misery, what tortures in those four strings! . . . And as to his expressiveness, his manner of phrasing, his soul, in fact ———!"

There it was. Liszt had found himself.

Paganini's playing seemed to come directly from the soul, and the weird originality, the stupendous difficulties of his violin compositions were regarded as outward manifestations of his tormented inner life. Virtuosity there had been before Paganini, but his was a virtuosity fraught with intense feeling. And while other influences—notably those of Berlioz and Chopin—contributed to Liszt's growth, it was Paganini's example that impelled him to seek bold new techniques and resources in an instrument far more powerful and versatile

than the violin. In 1838, Liszt embarked on his first concert tours, initiating a career that was to surpass that of Paganini himself.

Liszt's *Etudes d'exécution transcendante d'après Paganini* were published in 1840, though he had probably begun working on them soon after the experience related above. Robert Schumann, to whose wife these *Etudes* were dedicated (and who had himself published two collections of Paganini transcriptions some years earlier), quite correctly observed in a review that they represented a compendium of all that Liszt had achieved as the boldest piano virtuoso of his time. He also noted that they were the most difficult piano pieces ever composed—too difficult, in fact. Liszt himself recognized this, too, for, in 1852, he republished them, as *Grandes Etudes de Paganini*, in a less formidable and, on the whole, much improved version—the standard version today.

With the exception of No. 3, the *Etudes* are based on Paganini's *Twenty-four Caprices for Solo Violin*, Op. 1 (Milan, 1818). They range from remarkably faithful transcriptions (Nos. 4 and 5) to the transformation of a rather diffuse original into a new, superbly organized composition (No. 3, based on "La campanella," the finale of Paganini's B-Minor Violin Concerto). Everywhere, specific violinistic effects are converted into thoroughly pianistic equivalents, nowhere more so than in the dazzling set of variations that crowns the work (they are based, of course, on the Paganini theme later used by Brahms, Rachmaninoff, and others). "Whoever can master these variations," commented Schumann, "may confidently journey the world over, to return bearing golden laurels as a second Paganini-Liszt."

But, in time, Liszt reacted against what was becoming perhaps a too close association with Paganini. In 1853, in response to an article about him in a German encyclopedia, he wrote: "After having attained, according to my biographer, the first aim of my youth—that of being called the Paganini of the Piano—it seems to me natural that I should seriously aspire to bear *my own name*." For, in 1848, he had given up the career of a touring virtuoso and had settled in Weimar as the musical director of that grand duchy. Under his leadership, Weimar soon became the stronghold of the "New Music," of "Neo-Romanticism," or (as its detractors called it), the "music of the future." The bitter rift that split the musical world at that time has never been wholly mended; and if Neo-Romanticism gained its share of triumphs with Wagner's music dramas, the fact remains that Liszt's pioneering works of the Weimar period, which in so many ways anticipated Wagner's, are to this day viewed with suspicion in some quarters.

Yet, few today would quibble over the merits of the B-Minor Piano Sonata. It was composed in 1852-53 and published in 1854. That he dedicated it to Schumann may reflect Liszt's belief that, despite its unorthodox form, the sonata would appeal to his friend and colleague, and so to the more conservative faction. But Schumann's mind had just then succumbed to its fateful illness, and the B-Minor Sonata became, instead, the object of a particularly acrid controversy. Even as late as 1882, the critic of London's *Musical Times* could write:

With the exception of numberless and equally meaningless phrases, and a few not uninteresting, albeit somewhat affected, leading themes, the elaboration of this rhapsody, misnamed a sonata, is to our thinking positively ugly, calling to mind not unfrequently in its progress the malicious remark attributed to Rossini, in reference to a work of another modern composer . . . viz., *Si c'était de la musique, ce serait horrible*. [If this were music, it would be hideous.]

What rankled, especially, was the title. "Sonata," to most of Liszt's contemporaries, meant a multi-movement work that adhered to conventions traceable (they firmly, if erroneously, believed) to the masterpieces of Mozart and Beethoven. Liszt's sonata, viewed in that light, amounted to a piece of effrontery: It was cast in a single movement, its four or five themes recurred throughout and were subjected to bewildering new combinations and permutations, its tempo, texture and moods

were quite unpredictable. In sum, it lacked the most rudimentary distinguishing traits of the genus *sonata*. So it did. But the inspired, quasi-improvisatory language of Liszt's mature style required a more continuous channel of expression. He, therefore, developed the potentialities of the cyclic form. He had experimented with it before and would again, notably in his symphonic poems. However, neither Liszt nor his many imitators ever quite succeeded in matching the forcefulness, drama, and inexorable logic that make of the B-Minor Sonata one of the landmarks of the piano literature.

—Piero Weiss

## ANDRÉ WATTS

This sensational young American pianist has amply fulfilled the glowing prophecies made for him in February 1963, when he was 16-going-on-17, and when Leonard Bernstein introduced him to U.S. viewers from coast to coast as soloist for a New York Philharmonic Young People's Concert. At that time, he delivered a performance so spectacular that, on the strength of it, he was engaged just 20 days later as last-minute substitute for the ailing Glenn Gould at a regular Philharmonic subscription concert and won, in the report of *Life* magazine, "the season's wildest ovation."

In the intervening years, Watts has enjoyed sensationally successful appearances in most of the important American cities and with a dozen major U.S. symphony orchestras; a European debut with the London Symphony in June 1966 after which *The London Daily Express* reported that "a subtle and wide-ranging virtuoso has arrived on the musical scene"; a debut with the Berlin Philharmonic a year later on his 21st birthday, when, according to *Der Telegraf*, "he conquered the Berliner audience, took them by storm, displayed a natural talent of overwhelming force"; and a world tour for the U.S. State Department in the fall of 1967 that was a succession of unprecedented triumphs.

On January 18, 1969, André Watts returned to New York to celebrate the fifth anniversary of his now historic debut in a reunion performance with Leonard Bernstein and the Philharmonic. "The audience," wrote Harold Schonberg in the next day's *New York Times*, "all but tore the house down." Schonberg went on to deduce from Watts' performance of the great B-Flat Piano Concerto of Brahms that "he has matured in the right direction and now has a fusion of technique with musicianship. It was a performance that put Watts up with the elite of pianists anywhere."

Born in Nürnberg, Germany, the son of an American Negro GI and his Hungarian wife, André Watts lived in Europe until he was 8. His first musical instrument wasn't the piano, but a miniature violin, which he began playing at the age of 4. By the time he was 6, however, he made clear his preference for the piano, and his mother, a good pianist herself, gave him his first lessons. When the family moved to Philadelphia, André was enrolled at the Musical Academy in Philadelphia. At the age of 9, he won out over 40 young pianists to play a Haydn concerto for one of the Youth Concerts of the Philadelphia Orchestra. A year later, he performed the Mendelssohn G-Minor Concerto at Robin Hood Dell, and, at 14, he was soloist again with the Philadelphia Orchestra, in the César Franck "Symphonic Variations." Shortly afterwards, his teachers recommended that he come to New York to audition for an appearance at one of the Young People's Concerts of the New York Philharmonic. Subsequently, Leonard Bernstein engaged Watts for two of the Philharmonic's regular concerts. The ovations that he received on those occasions catapulted the young pianist to overnight world fame.

Engineering: Fred Plaut, John Gueriere, Raymond Moore  
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LISZT:  
 Sonata in B Minor

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LISZT: The Six Paganini Etudes  
1. I - G Minor  
2. II - E Flat Major  
3. III - G-Sharp Minor (La Campanella)  
4. IV - E Major  
5. V - E Major (La Chasse)  
6. VI - A Minor

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